

Summary & Conclusions

Search function of job boards reviewed: who is the winner (part 5)

Jaap van de Putte, 2 use it | December 18 2008 | Editor: Sue Brokmann

This article is the fifth and last article in a series of 5 about our study on the search function of job boards. We compared 9 job boards and assessed how well they complied to the checklist we developed.

In the first four articles we wrote about the different parts of the search function on job boards. In this article we collect our findings.

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1. Introduction

In the spring of 2008 we evaluated the keyword search function of 9 job boards with a group of 30 students:

- Monsterboard, www.monsterboard.nl
- Nationale Vacaturebank, www.nationalevacaturebank.nl
- Jobtrack, www.jobtrack.nl
- Intermediair, www.intermediair.nl
- Stepstone, www.stepstone.nl
- Academic Transfer, www.academictransfer.nl
- Werken bij de Overheid, www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl
- Jobs.ac.uk, www.jobs.ac.uk
- Indeed.com, www.indeed.com

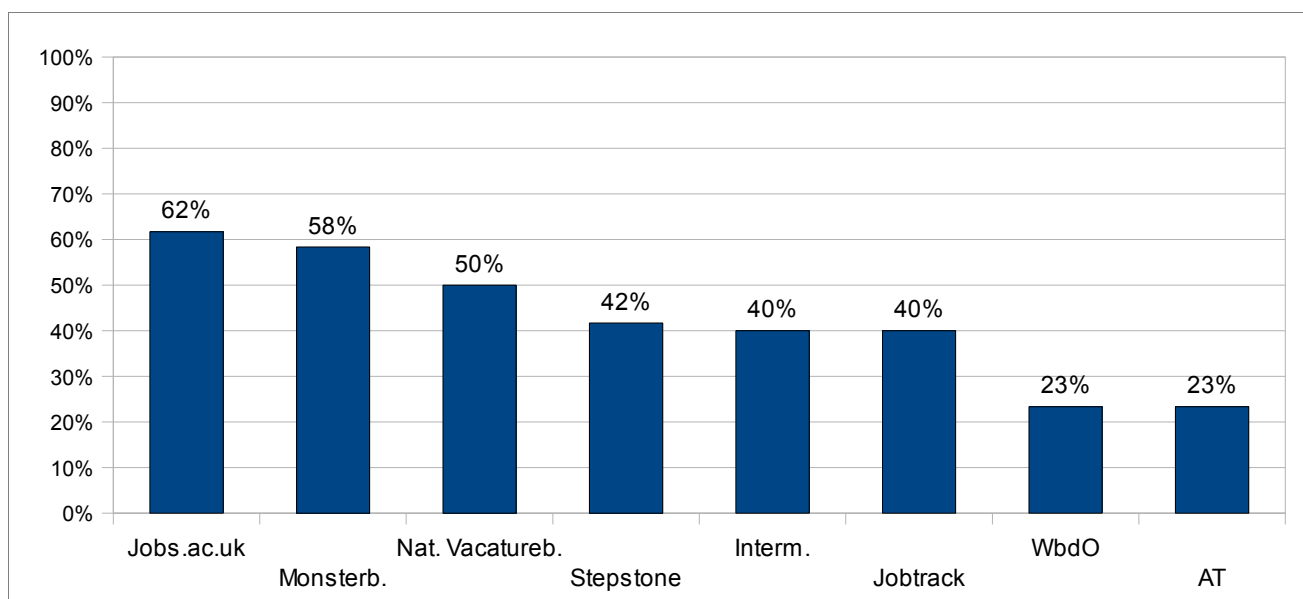
All our conclusions have already been published in several online articles:

- Introduction to the study: www.2useit.nl/usabilityupdate/searching-a-job-online-part1.php
- Search (start) interface: www.2useit.nl/usabilityupdate/searching-a-job-online-part2.php
- Search Engine Results Page (SERP):
www.2useit.nl/usabilityupdate/searching-a-job-online-part3.php.
- Vacancy detail page: www.2useit.nl/usabilityupdate/searching-a-job-online-part4.php

2. First conclusion: non-Dutch job boards beat the Dutch

In the diagram below we calculated the total score of all the job boards on the three parts of the search function: Search Interface, Search Engine Results Page (SERP) and vacancy detail page. The survey was conducted among 7 Dutch job boards and two non-Dutch boards: Indeed.com from the US and Jobs.ac.uk from the UK. And, surprisingly or not, the top 2 sites are the non-Dutch sites. You must note that we didn't score the vacancy detail page for Indeed, as Indeed has no detail pages of their own.

Jobs.ac.uk has and their score is with 62% good, compared with the other sites.



	Indeed.com	Jobs.ac.uk	Monsterb.	Nat.vac.bank	Step-stone	Intern.	Jobtrack	WbdO	Academic-Transfer
Search Interface	100%	75%	75%	50 %	75 %	50 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
SERP	100%	30%	80%	40 %	30 %	50 %	60 %	30 %	30 %
Detail Page	n/a	80%	20%	60 %	20 %	20 %	60 %	40 %	40 %
TOTAL	100%	62%	58%	50%	42%	40%	40%	23%	23%

Three sites offer no keyword search. As we consider keyword search as the key search method we calculated this omission as a 0 % result. This is the case with Jobtrack, Werken bij de Overheid¹ and AcademicTransfer.

For Indeed.com there is not much to improve. They have an excellent search function and other job boards can take advantage of them by "embracing and enhancing" them. Jobs.ac.uk has the challenge to improve their SERP, which with a score of 30 % has a lot of possibilities to improve it.

Monsterboard is the third in line. If they improve their detail page they will easily rise to 70 or 80 %.

1 Working with [Sue?? at?] the government

For the Dutch boards the study shows them a number of possibilities to improve their site. We know this survey is not a quantitative study, however it is a conclusion that must be material for reflection for the Dutch sites.

3. Recommendations and best practices (start) search interface

A Search Interface is the place to start your search. It is made up of at least a text input field and a search button.

Offer a wide search box with space for at least 40 characters (or a text box of at least 250 pixels).

Searchers tend to use more than one keywords. To reduce memory load and the risk of typos it is recommended to have a wide search box.

Provide a clear search button

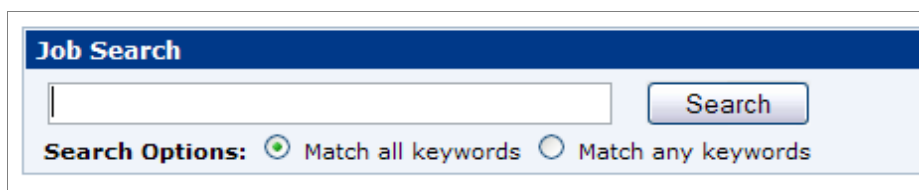
See the search button on Stepstone (see image below): easy to find, clear text and no ambiguity. (*Vacatures zoeken op trefwoord = Search vacancies by keyword*)



Keep the filtering limited

A filter can do more harm than good. Be careful with it in your start search interface. It is better to offer filtering by the SERP or in Advanced Search.

A good example of a limited filter we find on jobs.ac.uk.



Support Boolean search

Boolean search is still a wanted functionality in search engines. Adding it to your search function only reinforces it.

For example: when your search query is "scien" the results could include the following: scientist, scientific and science. Searching on "science - phd" will give you all science jobs except for the PhD-positions.*

4. Recommendations and best practices Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

The search box – input field with search button – is above the results.

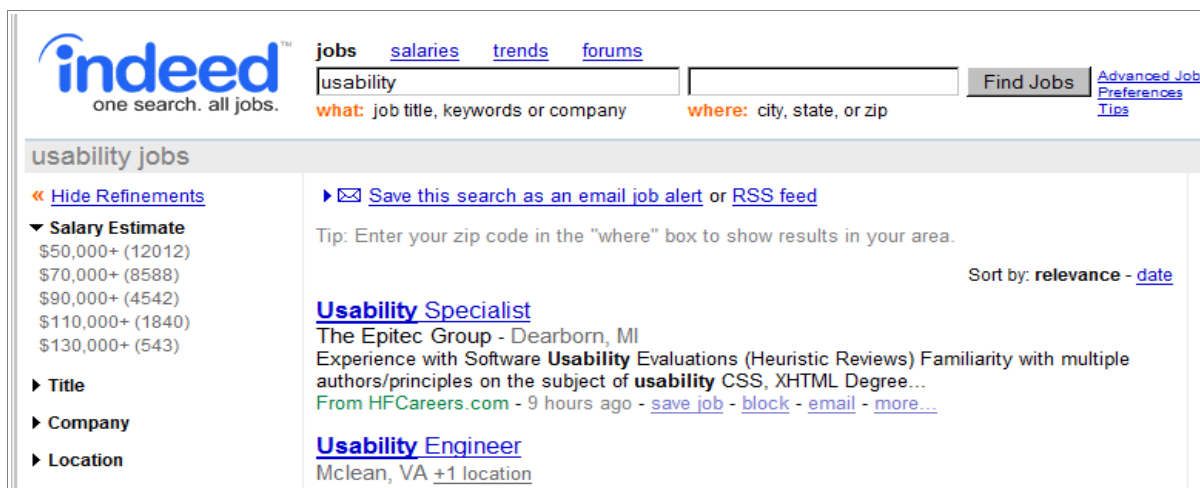
In combination with the next recommendation, this is a MustHave # 1. It is possible, although less preferable, to place the box on the left or the right of the results.

The search query is in the search box and is directly adaptable.

It is of great convenience for the visitor to be able to see his search query and to adapt it directly. This recommendation is also a guideline from the Webrichtlijnen.

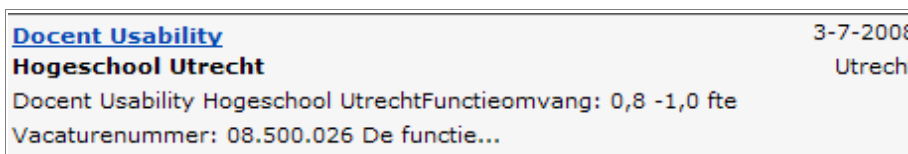
Below we present you the search box on indeed.com. As you see: the search box is above the results and the search query (usability) is visible and directly adaptable.

It is just like Google.



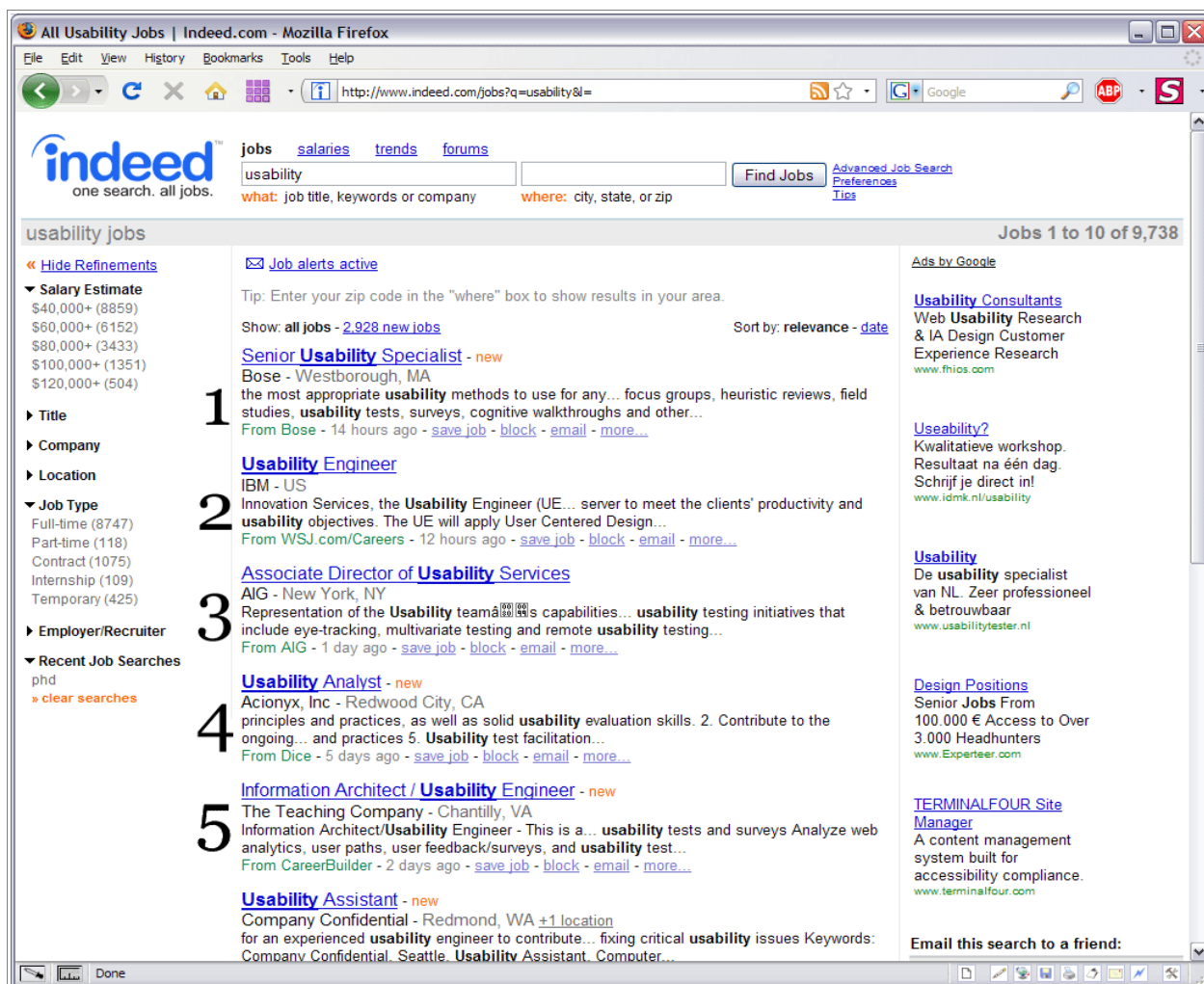
The job title is clickable and leads to the full job description.

All job boards have a clickable title. We also recommend that the title has the "clickable scent" by colouring or underlining it.



There are at least 4 vacancies visible (screen resolution: 1024 x 768).

Below we show you a screenshot of the SERP of indeed.com on a resolution of 1024 x 768: there are 5 vacancies visible above the fold.



Each result has a summary of more than 100 characters.

A summary is necessary to get a glimpse of the vacancy. Providing a summary diminishes the risk of clicking on the not preferred job.



The date format is universal.

Unfortunately, we do not use one date format in the world. Therefore, it is a good practice to write the date in a way that it is clear from the North Pole to the South. You achieve this by writing out (a part of) the name of the month in letters.

For example the date format on Monsterboard is clear for a citizen in the Netherlands but also in the United States.

Webmarketeer (24 upw) - Almere	Unique Nederland Almere, FL 1314	12 okt
+ Uitklappen	Kaart bekijken	Vacature bewaren

When there are 0 results, the site shows tips for better search.

In most cases 0 results means for the searcher that he has to re-do his search. Help him in this situation by giving him some hints for further search.

Indeed.com shows Google-like suggestions on the 0-results page. Although, getting email from these jobs seems to be a not very useful tip.

The search **usebility** did not match any jobs

Did you mean: [usability jobs nationwide](#) (about 16201 jobs)

Search suggestions:

- ◆ Try more general keywords
- ◆ Check your spelling
- ◆ Replace abbreviations with the entire word

[✉ Get email updates for the latest usebility jobs](#)

Results can be sorted by relevance and date.

In most cases the results are sorted by date and that is probably the way most people want to have the results sorted. Sorting by relevance is also a useful way of sorting. We expect that sorting by relevance gives us results that start with the jobs where the search query is found in the job title or - if available - the teaser of a vacancy. Other ways of sorting, like alphabetic sorting, seem to have no extra value.

A good way of offering the sorting methods were found on Indeed.com: the sorting methods are directly visible and adaptable. No unnecessary methods are offered.

Sort by: **relevance** - [date](#)

Results are spread over pages and the elements of paging are big enough.

Most job boards spread their results over pages (if there are more than 10 results). The paging elements should be bigger than just a number in a default font size so the elements are easily clickable. There is not one site that has fairly big paging elements.

Below we show a good example of fairly big paging elements.

Resultatenpagina's: [« Vorige](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) [20](#) [21](#) [Volgende »](#)

Refinements can be made easily.

People tend to use a search function with a minimum of mental effort. As soon as the results are shown they start thinking. That is the moment that refinements must be available and easily usable. After using them it must be visible which filters have been used.

Indeed.com shows the refinements in an excellent way. They are visible, easily adaptable and easy to use.

5. Recommendations and best practices Vacancy detail page

After clicking on a result in the SERP you find yourself on a page with the full vacancy description. We call that the vacancy page or detail page.

The layout of the detail page is consistent with the other pages of the site.

A common fact in usability is that a website has a consistent layout so we perceive the pages as being part of one site. In most cases this means that the header is comparable, that colours are similar on all pages, that the main menu is the same and – if there is a universal search – that it is available on this page too (see Stijlgids Overheid¹). Slight deviations are no problem as long as the general experience keeps intact.

A good example of a consistent detail page can be found on jobs.ac.uk (see image below).

The screenshot shows a job detail page on the jobs.ac.uk website. The header includes the site logo, navigation tabs (Job Search, Browse Jobs, Jobs By Email, Career Development, Recruiters, About Us), and links for Contact Us and Site Map. The main content area features the University of Nottingham logo and the job title 'PhD Studentship' under the 'Advanced Composite Materials' department. A video thumbnail is present with a 'Click here to view our Employer Video' link. The job description text describes the role in polymer composites. A 'Useful Features' sidebar offers links for job alerts, email sharing, and career advice. A 'New Search' sidebar includes a keyword search box and matching options. A 'More from this employer' sidebar lists other roles like Catering Assistant and Team Leader.

1 <http://stijlgids.overheid.nl/stijlgids/inhoud/#zoek>

The layout of the detail pages is consistent.

For the scannability of job descriptions it is important that the detail pages have a comparable layout.

Below you see 2 screenshots of vacancies on Monsterboard. You see that the pages have a similar layout.

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of job listings from Monsterboard, illustrating a consistent layout. Each listing is divided into a summary sidebar and a main description area.

Left Screenshot: Lead Consultant

- Samenvatting**
 - Bedrijf:** Bos Search Select
 - Locatie:** Eindhoven, NB 5611
 - Branche:**
 - IT - hardware
 - IT - software
 - IT - diensten
 - Status:**
 - Fulltime
 - Vast dienstverband
 - Salaris:** 48,000.00 - 65,000.00 EUR /jaar
- Over de vacature**

Lead Consultant / Appl

Description:

The Internet plays an ever ago, online services such ; unknown. Today we can computer screens - a tren

Our client is a leader in le of-the-art internet technol continuously strive for inn our online presence with i video capabilities, using tc

This is only the beginning. is actively looking for entf

Right Screenshot: Web developer

- Samenvatting**
 - Bedrijf:** Compare Group
 - Locatie:** UTRECHT, UT 3511
 - Branche:** IT - internet
 - Status:**
 - Fulltime
 - Vast dienstverband
 - Relevante werkervaring:** 2 tot 5 jaar
 - Opleidingsniveau:** HBO
 - Carrièreniveau:** Midcareer (ervaren)
- Over de vacature**

Compare Group exploiteert meerd Vergelijk.nl, Vergelijk.be, Compai op de agenda. De missie van Comp aankoop. Onze passie: service leve

Kenmerkend voor Compare Group zichzelf en de organisatie continu t momenteel uit 35 enthousiaste prof

Om de afdeling Marketing afdeling

Web developer (

De functie

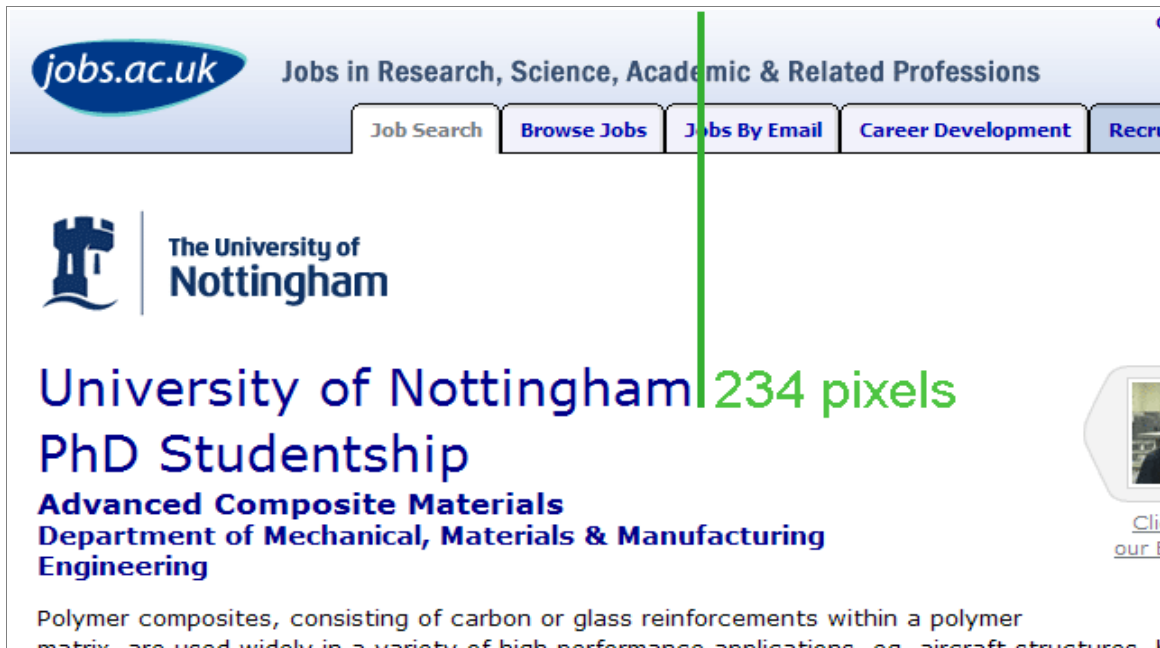
De Web developer is verantwoord bent gebruiker georiënteerd, je w elkaar kunt krijgen.

De functie vereist een goede balans design.

The vacancy title and description starts on 300 pixels or less from the top of the site.

In our study we defined the default screen height on 768 pixels. To be able to read a significant part of the job description we stated that the relevant content must start at 300 pixels. This means that an area of 468 pixels remains as the visible area where users can be stimulated to read the full job description.

Jobs.ac.uk starts its job title on 234 pixels (see image below). That is a very good score. Above the fold (that is the point where you have to scroll) there is 534 pixels space for directly visible information.



The description is easy to scan.

When you reach a vacancy detail page you want to read the main characteristics of the job in 2 seconds or even less: it must be clear in a glimpse. This requires a tightly structured introduction where you can directly see if it is of any interest for you. We want job seekers to be encouraged to search for jobs till they have found their job, not till they are tired or frustrated.

Some boards – like Monsterboard as shown below - show a summary on the left or the right of the job description. This is a great step forwards in making the content accessible.

<p>Samenvatting</p> <p>Bedrijf Owens Illinois</p> <p>Locatie Perrysburg, OH 43551</p> <p>Branche Cosmetica en persoonlijke verzorging</p> <p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulltime • Vast dienstverband <p>Relevante werkervaring 7 tot 10 jaar</p> <p>Opleidingsniveau MBA / WO</p> <p>Carriëرنiveau Midcareer (ervaren)</p> <p>Salaris Competitive</p>	<p>Glass Science Leader - Glass Science Leader</p> <p>Over de vacature</p> <p>Opportunity is O-I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are you looking for an opportunity to develop, build, and lead a R&D team for a company that desires to change the way the world makes glass?</i> • <i>Do you desire to work with a world leader that is committed to industry leadership through innovation?</i> <p>Owens-Illinois, Inc. (O-I) is the largest manufacturer of glass containers in the world, with leading positions in Europe, North America, Asia Pacific and Latin America. Its innovative packaging products are found in households and businesses and its customers manufacture and market many of the best-known consumer-products around the globe.</p> <p>With operations on five continents, O-I is the world's leading manufacturer of glass packaging products. Each day at O-I, nearly 30,000 employees worldwide are united in a common goal - to be the best in their particular disciplines and to make a personal contribution to the success of the Company as a whole. The ingenuity, determination and work ethic of O-I people has been core strength and a major component of our success for over one hundred years.</p> <p>We are seeking an ambitious, qualified Glass Research Scientist to build and lead a team and function that will propel O-I into the future of glass making.</p>
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There are links to relevant jobs.

In most cases a job seeker will browse several jobs until he finds a suitable job. To fit in with these needs of the seeker it is recommended to show relevant links to other jobs on the vacancy detail page.

What we expect are the top 5 vacancies from the SERP. Yet we did not find one job board that offers them.